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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 08 RIYADH 000636

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PHUM KISL KWMN SA

SUBJECT: 19TH ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT: OPENING SESSION

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Summary: King Abdullah used his speech to the opening session of the Arab League Summit in Riyadh on March 28 to criticize publicly U.S. policy in Iraq by referring to the "illegal foreign occupation" of that country, albeit without naming the U.S. or the Coalition Forces. The King issued a "wake-up call" to Arab leaders to unite and overcome "backwardness" in order to solve regional problems, as well as to restore hope and credibility to the region. He also called for an end to the "unjust siege" of the Palestinian people. Arab League SYG Amr Mousa warned that the Arab world is at an "unprecedented juncture of unrest" and the Israeli-Arab conflict "at a crossroads that can move to genuine peace or more turmoil." UN SYG Ban said that the Middle East is more complex and dangerous than it has been for some time. Malaysia and Turkey offered to help the Arab League resolve its problems. Speakers "commended" King Abdullah for bringing Hamas and Fatah together in order to achieve the Mecca agreement that led to the creation of the Palestinian National Unity Government. Several speakers called for an end to economic and budgetary sanctions against the Palestinian government. The Ambassador and Poloff attended the session, along with representatives of other diplomatic missions. END SUMMARY.

Atmospherics

¶2. (C) The opening session of the 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh on March 28 featured addresses, in order of appearance, by outgoing Arab League Chairman and Sudanese President Omar Al-Beshir, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Arab League Secretary General (SYG) Amr Mousa, United Nations (UN) SYG Ban Ki-Moon (South Korea), President of the 61st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Sheikha Haya bin Rashid Al-Khalifa (Bahrain), Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Chairman and Kenyan President Kibaki, Malaysian Prime Minister and current Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Several speakers, notably Mousa,

called for a "fair mediator" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, alluding to international bias in favor of Israel. Many speakers called for ending the occupation of Palestinian territories and establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The overriding theme was the need for unity, dialogue, and action in dispute resolution, creating stability and security in the Arab world -- including in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan.

¶3. (C) Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud opened the 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh's palatial King Abdul Aziz International Conference Center. The King personally greeted the heads of Arab League delegations and several leaders greeted him warmly with three or more kisses to his cheeks. The King entered the cavernous conference hall with Egyptian President Mubarak on his left and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh on his right. The manner in which delegates were greeted upon arrival to the Kingdom was also a clear statement of the Saudis' relations with them. The Egyptian President was met personally by the King and driven from the airport in the King's vehicle. However, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud was greeted at the same level as the President of Mauritania and the Emir of Qatar, who arrived late. They were the only delegates not greeted by a key member of the Saudi royal family. Instead, they were greeted by Deputy Governor of Riyadh Prince Sattam bin Abd al-Aziz.

¶4. (C) Preceding King Abdullah into the conference hall, Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud made a point of first greeting the already seated Syrian delegation, which was seated one delegation away from the Saudis. When

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King Abdullah moved to the podium to give his welcoming speech and take his place on the dais, Director of the General Intelligence Presidency (GIP) HRH Prince Muqrin bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud placed a cushion in what had been the King's seat so that the shorter Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud could sit comfortably at the head of the Saudi delegation.

¶5. (C) Reportedly the first Arab League meeting in Riyadh since April 1962, Libya boycotted the Summit, and only Oman was not represented by a head state. Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers Sayyid Fahad bin Mahmood Al-Said represented Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Lebanon was represented by two rival delegations consisting of Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and President Lahoud. During the address by UN SYG Ban, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad first left the hall, followed by the Iranian observer delegation. Asad only returned near the end of the address by IGAD Chairman and Kenyan President Kibaki. The Iranian observer delegation returned at the beginning of the address by OIC Chairman Abdullah. Some speakers pointed out the special significance of meeting in the KSA, calling it "blessed soil and the land of revelation" (Al-Beshir) and "a blessed land" (Mousa). Pakistani President Musharraf emphasized the ties of brotherhood linking non-Arab states with the Arab League members.

Saudi King Abdullah's Speech

¶6. (C) Saudi King Abdullah questioned what the Arab League had accomplished in its 60 plus years, including whether it had unified Arabs politically, militarily, economically, and psychologically. The King pointed out that the Arab world is currently further away from unity than when the Arab League was founded in 1945. He said that the Palestinian people face occupation and repression and are denied the right to independence and a state. He said that since Palestinian leaders had met in Mecca and agreed to form the Palestinian National Unity Government, it is essential to end the "unjust

siege" imposed on the Palestinian people as soon as possible. He said that the peace process should be far from "compulsion and repression" so that an independent Palestinian state can be established. In a rare example of public criticism of U.S. policy, he said that Iraq is under "illegal foreign occupation," adding that continued bloodshed and "detestable sectarianism" would lead to a "civil war." He said that Lebanon was once a good example of coexistence and prosperity, but is now crippled. He said sarcastically that "Arab meekness" had paved the way for foreign intervention in Sudan's affairs. He also noted that Somalia has endured one civil war after another. He blamed the leaders of the Arab nations for these problems, not the Arab League. He said that permanent differences and the refusal to unite and cast off "backwardness" have made the Arab nation lose hope and confidence in the credibility of Arab leaders. He called on Arab leaders to restore confidence, which will in turn restore credibility, and then hope. He said that then Arabs will never allow forces from outside the region to decide its future, adding that only the "banner of Arabism" should fly over Arab lands. He said that God has given Arabs dignity, brains, and a conscience that differentiates between good, evil, truth, and lies. He said that he is optimistic, despite the difficulties, despair, and reasons for pessimism.

He ended his speech by calling for Arab leaders to bring unity, dignity, and prosperity to the Arab nation.

Guests and Observers

¶7. (C) In addition to representatives from 21 of the 22 Arab League states (Libya boycotted), a number of organizations and countries were invited to attend. The guests that addressed the assembly included: UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon (South Korea), President of the 61st Session of the UNGA Sheikha Haya bin Rashid Al-Khalifa (Bahrain), Pakistani President Musharraf, IGAD Chairman and Kenyan President Kibaki, Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In addition to almost all Ambassadors

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accredited to Riyadh, other observers included: European Union (EU) High Commissioner Javier Solana (in lieu of German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier), African Union Chairman Alfa Omer Konary, OIC SYG Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed, and Chinese Ambassador to Egypt and Representative to the Arab League Wu Sike. Also in attendance were Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki, Sudanese Foreign Affairs Minister Lam Akol, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, an unidentified representative of Cuba, which is currently the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel.

Palestinian Conflict

¶8. (C) UN SYG Ban pointed out that after more than 40 years, Arab territory continues to be occupied and the Palestinian people are denied a state. Pakistani President Musharraf said that the Palestinian conflict is a tragedy that affects all Muslims, Arab and non-Arab. He said that for 60 years, there has been no peace and the Palestinians have suffered and been denied their rights. Musharraf said that aggressive Israeli actions are increasing and adversely impacting a just settlement. UN SYG Ban said that the status quo is dangerous, emphasizing that the 2002 Arab Peace

Initiative is a clear signal that Arabs want peace. He urged Israel to take a "fresh look" at it. He called for a negotiated two-state solution with a secure and fully recognized Israel and an independent Palestinian state. However, he warned, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would not be a panacea, although it could help promote moderation and pluralism. He described the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as a positive sign and urged Israel to engage Palestinian President Abbas in reaching a final solution.

¶ 9. (C) UNGA President Al-Khalifa said that the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative shows that Arabs want a comprehensive solution. Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said that the OIC also supports a two-state solution. Mousa called the Arab-Israeli conflict the core of prevailing unrest in the region, stating that Israel has persistently altered geography and demographics, raised vicious circles, and imposed a "fait accompli" in the occupied territories. He said that Israel wants the Arabs to amend the 2002 Arab Peace Proposal, but instead called on Israel to accept the proposal before calling for amendments. He decried the "lopsidedness of influential world policy and bias" towards Israel that has resulted in "paralysis of the peace process." Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said the U.S. plays an important role, but is perceived as favoring Israel. Therefore, the U.S. is not considered as a fair and balanced mediator. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that the international community should address the conflict without prejudice. Musharraf said that the U.S. and Europe have a historic responsibility to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said that their inability to resolve this conflict has damaged their principles and "moral imperative." Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said that the Arab League, OIC, and other organizations have a duty to resolve the problems of the Palestinian people.

¶ 10. (C) Mousa called on countries to lift the blockade of Palestinians, which he claimed, "only serves the interests of Israel." He commended European countries that have recognized the Palestinian National Unity Government and praised the presence of the Norwegian Foreign Minister. Al-Beshir stated that the Palestinian government needs immediate budgetary support, calling for the end of the "unjust blockade" of Palestinian territories by Israel and the international community in order to support the newly-formed Palestinian National Unity Government. He added that this blockade precludes the Palestinians from having a

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"decent and dignified life," and lifting it would alleviate their suffering. UN SYG Ban criticized Israeli settlements and construction of physical barriers, citing "constraints" relating to a meaningful peace process. He described the formation of the Palestinian National Unity Government as a "positive sign," calling on the leaders of Hamas and Fatah to resolve their differences and commending Palestinian President Abbas for his unambiguous commitment to peace. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that Israel should be cooperative, and both Erdogan and Musharraf spoke positively about the Palestinian National Unity Government. Mousa, Al-Beshir, and Musharraf all called for ending the occupation of Palestinian territories and establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Lebanon

¶ 11. (C) UN SYG Ban said that Lebanon is a priority and called for a stable and independent Lebanon. He said he supports the democratically elected government and he would travel to Lebanon following the Summit. He said he is pleased that the cessation of hostilities in Lebanon is holding, adding that UNIFIL has been strengthened and calling

for full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 11701. Al-Beshir denounced "the unjust aggression by Israel against Lebanon" that targeted people and infrastructure. He said that Arab League SYG Mousa had consulted with Arab governments before convening the extraordinary summit that helped stop the aggression. Al-Beshir said the Arab League then sent a special envoy to Lebanon to end the "media escalation" between the Lebanese government and its opposition, and tried to bring together Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and Lebanese President Emile Lahoud. Since this effort has not yet been successful, Al-Beshir hoped that this could be accomplished during the Arab League Summit. UN SYG Ban described Siniora as "impressive" and urged the Lebanese to resolve their problems through dialogue and negotiation. Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said that the Lebanese government needs to be more inclusive. Mousa said that the Arab League and Saudi Arabia have a "basket of proposals" for bringing harmony and reconciliation to Lebanon, adding that the "truth of the crime that befell Hariri" needs to be known.

Iraq

12 (C) Pakistani President Musharraf said that Iraq is a tragedy that affects all Muslims -- Arab and non-Arab. He called for all to work together to ensure "fairness, justice, and realism." Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that Iraq is crucial and in turmoil. UN SYG Ban said that Iraq is troubling, citing the daily attacks on civilians and alleging decreasing access to essential services. Mousa said that Iraq has been in tremendous misery since the war began in March 2003 under "doubtful objectives." Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said there is too much infighting in Iraq and that the sectarian and tribal conflicts must stop. He stated that the Iraqis could govern themselves, noting that before peace can return, they must unite. Al-Beshir claimed that conditions have deteriorated over the last year, citing explosions, assassinations, and violence. Mousa said that sectarian fighting will make everyone a victim. He said that Arabs, neighboring countries, and the international community are responsible. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan called for increased cooperation and unity, describing the division of Iraq as a disaster that would be unacceptable to all countries in the region. UN SYG Ban commended Syria and Jordan for helping with Iraqi refugees, saying that the UN will hold a conference in Geneva in May to address how to meet the needs of Iraqi displaced persons and refugees. He added that the UN will co-chair Iraqi recovery and reconciliation in order to reduce sectarian violence and improve human rights. He said that not only "others" have interests in Iraq, but that Arabs have "huge" interests there.

113. (C) Al-Beshir called for national reconciliation and support for any initiative that supports Iraq and results in

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a national accord for stability and security. He called for adjustments to the Iraqi constitution that would benefit citizens and lead to a just distribution of wealth, as well as for the withdrawal of foreign forces and a timeframe for that withdrawal. Mousa said that all concerned should admit that Iraq needs a political solution -- not just a security solution. Mousa and Al-Beshir cited the Committee of Iraq that recently met in Egypt. Mousa said that the Arab League is ready to hold another conference like those held in Cairo in 2005 and 2006 so that Iraqi political and religious groups can achieve a real, historic reconciliation. Mousa called for a comprehensive understanding involving the UN, OIC, and Iraq's neighbors so that Iraq can re-emerge on the basis of "real democracy," not sectarianism. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan underlined the importance of Kirkuk. He warned that any negative events in northern Iraq would lead to greater difficulties in Iraq and the region.

Iran

¶14. (C) There was remarkably little public discussion of Iran in the Summit's plenary session. UN SYG Ban said that Iran is heedless of regional and international concerns. Musharraf said that the recent meeting between King Abdullah and Iranian President Ahmadinejad had had a good influence on the Gulf region, helping to prevent "a new conflict." He said that the KSA and Iran can work together through effective diplomacy to avert a disaster in the region.

Sudan

¶15. (C) Arab League SYG Mousa warned of "ever-growing dangers" in Sudan, and UN SYG Ban said that the fighting has not ended and there is targeted sexual violence. He said that all sides have abrogated human rights, adding that there are two million displaced persons and four million people who rely on international humanitarian assistance. Ban called for implementation of the Abuja and Addis Ababa agreements. Mousa called for no interference in the political life of Sudan and said that the unity of Sudan should never be revoked. He called for speeding up the political process in Darfur and broadening the Abuja peace agreement. He said that those who did not sign the Abuja peace agreement should still abide by it. Mousa called for more support and assistance by governments and civil society for refugee camps, inviting Arab investment in Sudan and calling for a development fund. Mousa said that an office had been established in Juba to support the 2005 peace agreement, which also addresses Southern Sudan. Mousa also cited the Addis Ababa agreement on peacekeeping, calling for a dialogue by the people of Darfur.

16 (C) Al-Beshir noted that the African Union signed the Abuja Agreement in May 2006, which is a way to move forward to peace and progress. He said that the parties have started to implement the military, economic, and political components of the agreement. Al-Beshir said that sanctions should not be used to achieve reconciliation and harmony in Darfur, claiming that UN Security Council resolution 1706 is difficult to implement. Al-Beshir said he does not want foreign forces in Sudan, noting that in 2006, the Africa Peace and Security Council adopted a plan that has three parts. He pointed out that a mission had been dispatched to Darfur and he called for maintaining the African character of forces in Darfur. He said that the UN should promote peace and security. Al-Beshir asked for contributions so that the African Union mission can continue. He specifically thanked Egypt, Algeria, and Jordan. IGAD Chairman and Kenyan President Kibaki pointed out that Sudan is a member of IGAD and that January 9, 2007 marked the second anniversary of a peace agreement between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). He thanked Al-Beshir for remaining steadfast in implementing the agreement, although he pointed out that obstacles need to be overcome in order to fully implement it.

Somalia

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¶17. (C) Mousa warned of "ever-growing dangers" in the Horn of Africa, while UN SYG Ban said that Somalia is in a dire situation. Ban cited banditry, violence, and clan rivalries, noting that one in nine Somalis is displaced. He called on the transitional government to achieve a peaceful solution, not a military solution. Mousa announced that the SAG hosted a morning meeting regarding Somalia on March 28. He also

said that the Arab League backs Somali legitimacy and called for support for President Youssef, the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, the reaffirmation of Somali sovereignty, Arab investment in Somalia, and the convening of a conference on reconstruction for Somalia. Al-Beshir called for stability and security and requested contributions for the Somalia Fund. He said that the Arab League secretariat had held two sessions in 2006 (July and September) to promote a comprehensive national reconciliation that involves all parties in the country.

¶18. (C) IGAD Chairman and Kenyan President Kibaki pointed out that Somalia is a member of IGAD, noting that the African Union asked IGAD to restore normalcy to Somalia. Hence, in October 2004, the Reconciliation Charter established the Somalia's transitional federal government. He also said that the last few months have raised concerns and that there is now a historic opportunity to help the transitional federal government restore peace and security. He said that on April 17, an all inclusive national reconciliation conference will be held in Somalia that will include all Somali leaders from all religions and clans in an effort to promote forgiveness and tolerance. IGAD is asking the international community and the Arab League to provide unconditional support, especially financial support, in a timely manner. He emphasized that this support is needed so that additional African Union troops can be deployed. He thanked Algeria for providing aircraft and welcomed the UN Technical Assistance Team that will be training the Somali police and army. He said that the UN should take over from the African Union in the next six months.

Nuclear Weapons

¶19. (C) UN SYG Ban and UNGA President Al-Khalifa called for a region free of nuclear weapons. Al-Khalifa also called for a region free of all weapons of mass destruction. Mousa called for a regional nuclear-free zone and said that the Arab League opposes any nuclear weapons, without exception, in the Middle East. In a clear allusion to Iran and Israel, he said that one country cannot be denied nuclear weapons and another country allowed to have them. He said that every country has the right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology. Without elaborating, he said that this issue "serves the purposes of others." Al-Khalifa called for respect for international law, as well as national legitimacy that includes the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy with transparency.

On the Margins

¶20. (C) The media reported that Egypt proposed that the Arab League forge closer military and security ties, including nuclear cooperation. Reportedly, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia held their own summit on March 28 before the beginning of the Arab League Summit. The media also reported that on March 27, King Abdullah met with Syrian President Asad, ostensibly to discuss Lebanon and other key regional issues. Libyan leader Gaddafi reportedly claimed that the U.S. had made the Arab League's decisions for it.

Fighting Corruption

¶21. (C) Mousa urged combating corruption in the Arab world. He said that this fight is the concern of many. He said that regional and international organizations have shown that corruption has an adverse impact on economic development.

Extremism

¶22. (C) UN SYG Ban said that unemployment and the lack of economic and political opportunities for youth can encourage radicalism. He said that all people, regardless of religion or nationality, should be free from want and fear. UNGA President Al-Khalifa called for controlling and combating sectarianism and fanaticism. Musharraf warned against the rise of "extremists and obscurantists," especially in Iraq. He said that fringe elements are maligning the Muslim culture and religion. He said that the West campaigns to "defame and provoke clashes with Islam." Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan warned that the international community perceives Islam as negative and thinks that it encourages violence, pointing out, however, that it actually cherishes all people regardless of religion or ethnicity.

Arab League Items

¶23. (C) Malaysian Prime Minister and current OIC Chairman Abdullah said that the inability to show unity and strong resolve only strengthens the tendency to marginalize Muslims and perceive them as divided. Mousa commended work with the African Union, the IGAD, China, Turkey, and Southeast Asia, as well as outgoing Arab League chairman Al-Beshir for his "distinctive and active manner" in shouldering with "deep sincerity" the responsibilities to implement the Arab League's agenda. Al-Beshir talked about Arab-African cooperation (1977), Arab-Latin American cooperation (2005), and Arab-Chinese cooperation (2006 - 2008). He called for the development of joint Arab action and the ratification of amendments to the Arab League Charter, including creation of an Arab Peace and Security Council, an Arab Court of Justice, and an Arab Scientific Research Council. Mousa also reminded Arab League members of the need to ratify the decision at the 2006 Khartoum Summit to establish an Arab Peace and Security Council. He said that this Arab Peace and Security Council will coordinate with the UN Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council. (NOTE: Reportedly, only four members out of a required seven have ratified the Arab Peace and Security Council agreement. The six Gulf Cooperation Council members already have a military agreement and have agreed to a Gulf Shield Defense Force. END NOTE). Mousa said the Arab League supported the UAE in regaining its three islands.

Human development

¶24. (C) UN SYG Ban cited the Arab achievements to increase literacy and life expectancy. He said that a dynamic Arab civil society bodes well for the region. UNGA President Al-Khalifa called for the Arab League to move from its peace and security foundation to social and economic issues, especially facilitating the movement of people and goods. She called for women have "full rights at different levels," emphasizing that women are a pillar in the promotion of development. She said that King Abdullah has demonstrated the importance of women in building communities. Mousa called for reactivation of the Arab Economic and Social Council, modernization of the Arab League general secretary, establishment of an Arab Free Trade Zone, increased trade among Arab League members, and liberalization of the services industry to include transport, tourism, sustainable development, and the development of industries. Mousa commended the Egyptian-Kuwaiti proposal to hold an economic summit and called on the Arab Economic Council to prepare for this summit. Mousa also called for open dialogue and denounced slander against the culture and identity of the Muslim people that sows doubts and jeopardizes security and stability. Additionally, he called for commitment and harmony in furthering economic and social cooperation and addressing issues pertaining to women, children, and families. Mousa said that Mauritania had embarked on the

path of democracy, empowerment of women, and a greater role for civil society. Mousa said that the Arab League had done an appraisal of education in member countries, conducted

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analytical studies, proposed reforms to modernize education, and established an Arab Education Quality Assurance Organization. Al-Beshir reported that in December 2006, a seminar was held in Khartoum for the promotion of scientific research and technology involving the Arab League and ministries of higher education.

COMMENT

¶25. (S) King Abdullah's choice of the opening session of the Arab League summit as a venue to voice tough and rare public criticism of U.S. policy in Iraq was both intentional and consequential. The King was clearly playing to his Arab League audience. He also may have been attempting to balance Saudi criticism of Iran with a public jibe at the U.S. That said, there can be no doubt that he was signaling the Kingdom's intention to put more daylight between its Iraq policy and that of the U.S. The possibility of U.S. troop withdrawals from Iraq, widely reported and discussed in the press here, has clearly unnerved the Saudi government (SAG), and Abdullah's remarks may be seen as an indication that the SAG is positioning itself for the next phase of developments in Iraq, following a potential U.S. withdrawal.

¶26. (S) Some speakers equated the Arab nation with the Islamic nation (ummah), thus reinforcing stereotypes and undermining claims of inclusion and tolerance of all religions and sects in the Arab world. Others appealed for unity in the Islamic nation, pointing out that the Arab nation is a part of a greater and more important whole. Iran, although a major preoccupation for many of the countries in attendance, was notable by its absence from the summit's plenary discussions. Summit speakers, including the King, preferred to emphasize the need for Arab unity in order to address such regional problems as Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan. Through its organization of the summit and its agenda, Saudi Arabia has clearly demonstrated its ambition to play a greater leadership role in the Arab world. END

COMMENT.
OBERWETTER